

During my term of office, I have freely asked the advice of the Board of General Purposes, on many questions that have arisen for consideration, and that advice has heartily, freely, and faithfully tendered me. I have received every possible assistance from the Grand Secretary, whose knowledge, correctness and promptness in the discharge of his duties, I most heartily recognize; and I have also to return thanks to many distinguished brethren abroad with whom I have corresponded, for information, given me; and particularly to our Very Worshipful Brother T. B. Harris, Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Canada.

I have felt it to be one of the duties of my office to carefully note the proceedings of the Grand Lodges with whom we are in fraternal association, and have, in addition to this, perused the somewhat voluminous reports of the Committees on "foreign correspondence" published by many of our sister Grand Lodges, in which there is sometimes a singular blending of useful information with unnecessary and often injudicious criticism. It appears to me that what may be called the domestic affairs of one jurisdiction are scarcely fit subjects for public criticism in another. Slight differences in the law or practice of one Grand Lodge are surely not worthy the solemn consideration of even a "foreign correspondence" Committee of another. I know of no advantage that can result to Freemasonry by attempting to reduce all its forms, ceremonials and observances to one level. It is enough that the essential principles, the aims, the object of the fraternity are everywhere the same. Let that suffice. In our respective jurisdictions there is enough practical work to do, without striving for the unattainable and the unnecessary. Generally the fraternity is in a flourishing condition, and generally harmony prevails. But there are some disturbing elements at work, and occasionally the "sound of the hammer is heard." The voice of Freemasonry should ever be the voice of peace. Even nations are beginning to discover that important differences may be settled without an appeal to force. Must we learn instead of being able to teach? Why should regular Grand Lodges suspend their amicable relations with each other, because they differ on a question that may be considered of much importance? There is nothing so important in Freemasonry as harmony. Its highest law is the law of fraternal love. The attempt of one Grand Lodge to force another to adopt its peculiar views on any Masonic question by suspending fraternal relations, and by issuing high sounding denunciatory edicts, is certainly subversive of the genuine spirit of this institution. It is more in keeping with that spirit to sustain a wrong than to indignantly resent it. Kindly efforts to settle troublesome questions need never be exhausted in Freemasonry. If they fail the seventh or the seventy-seventh time they will eventually be successful. When I read of Grand Lodges endeavouring to redress real or imaginary wrongs by a cessation of harmonious relations, by the suspending of fraternal intercourse, and by issuing fierce proclamations. I mourn over the spectacle, but I feel at least a melancholy satisfaction at the thought that the war, while it lasts, must be carried on entirely on paper.

I would not have referred at such length to any interruptions of the general harmony, did I not think that there is a growing tendency in some Grand Lodges to compel others to an adoption of their views on various Masonic questions by the exercise of force where argument has failed. Such a tendency is to be regretted, though there is little danger of it ever becoming general; but the effort to make it so is damaging to the best interests of the fraternity and may even prove disastrous to sound Masonic government.

In committing to your consideration the various topics to which I have referred, and the various questions which must necessarily arise during the Session, I do so, Brethren, in the full confidence that the spirit of toleration and kindness which has ever characterized our legislation, and which has done us good service in uniting us in this Grand Lodge, will continue to animate and influence us all. We cannot settle every perplexing question by legislation. Indeed the more law we have the more does the difficulty increase of satisfactorily expounding the law, and of holding evenly the "doubtful balance of right and wrong." The better I become acquainted with Masonic subjects; the more I am convinced of the wisdom of that wise conservatism which pervades the legislation of the Grand Lodges of the mother country—a legislation which, dealing largely with general principles, leaves to the subordinate bodies the widest latitude commensurate with lawful discipline, thus developing, instead of cramping, their individuality. The noble practical charities of these Grand Lodges are the rich fruits of their wise legislation, and are examples of Masonic beneficence and benevolence which it should be our glory, as far as we can, to imitate.

JOHN V. ELLIS,

Grand Master.